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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0431  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 001981

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2028

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SUBJECT: FM ABUL GHEIT RAISES CONCERNS OVER WEST BANK  
CONDITIONS AND PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAELI MFA DG

REF: TEL AVIV 2031

Classified By: ECPO Mincouns William R. Stewart per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) MFA Cabinet Advisor for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs Ahmed Hafez (please protect) briefed us September 5 on Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit's August 31 meeting in Cairo with Israeli MFA DG Aharon Abramovich. Hafez described the meeting's atmosphere as "positive," and stressed that the Egyptian side tried to maintain a positive tone in spite of the GOE's policy differences with the GOI on the peace process. According to Hafez, Aboul Gheit raised Egyptian concerns over lack of progress on the ground to improve Palestinian living conditions on the West Bank. Aboul Gheit complained about continued Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks, and the absence of a settlement freeze. The Foreign Minister also lamented what he perceives as little progress from the Olmert-Abbas and Livni-Abu Ala negotiations. Hafez acknowledged that Aboul Gheit did not repeatedly press DG Abramovich on these issues because the DG understands Abramovich is not a GOI decision-maker.

¶2. (C) Hafez said Abramovich cautioned Aboul Gheit to have low expectations for a peace deal by the end of 2008, and asserted to the FM that accelerating negotiations would not be helpful. According to Hafez, Abramovich blamed internal Israeli politics and an absence of Palestinian unity for the lack of progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

¶3. (C) Hafez told us that although Aboul Gheit did not agree with these points, he did not push back. Hafez said the GOE believes that the Palestinian Authority (PA) is not to blame for the lack of progress in the negotiations. The PA "is doing all it can" by continuing to meet with Olmert and Livni despite an absence of improvements on the ground in the West Bank, Hafez contended. According to Hafez, the GOE believes Israel is squarely to blame for the lack of progress since Annapolis. While the GOE acknowledges that PM Olmert's political weakness has hindered the direct negotiations with President Abbas, Hafez continued, the Egyptians believe the GOI can do much more to improve the life of Palestinians in the West Bank and bolster President Abbas' political standing.  
SCOBAY